



photo by Jennifer May

Bulbs in the Borders

Cats in the Beds

by Maxine Paetro

As I write this, it is a colorful Labor Day weekend.

No-fuss phlox blooms in five shades of pink and mauve in the cottage garden, while repeat-blooming roses join with royal purple buddleia in the long border. Graceful, pink Japanese anemones and stiff white alliums harmonize in the courtyard and up-facing panicles of *Hydrangea Tardiva*, draped with sweet autumn clematis, brighten the garden gate.

But, this bountiful September display signals the coming end of the garden season, and so, with the great encouragement of bulb catalogs arriving in real and virtual mail, I think about making room in the beds and borders for new spring bulbs.

Head gardener extraordinaire, Heather Thomson and I, look at garden photos from the previous April and May to see where bulb bloom was starting to fade.

We decide to add more Greenland and Spring Green *viridiflora* tulips to the cottage garden beds, lift and divide the pink-and-white daffs in the woodland, and increase the plantings of Hawera, a diminutive and long-lasting yellow narcissus that lights the path through the apple tunnel. And we will plant another two dozen Golden Splendor trumpet lilies in the rose border for a great July blast.

I take a deep breath and plunge into the catalogs with these bulbs in mind—as well as plans for a new garden entirely; a white garden where bulbs will be planted in virgin soil.

The spot I have in mind is thirty square feet of dry shade under an old spruce and native trees. Paths cross and wind around the trees to the generator, the propane gas tanks, and the storage areas behind the garden shed.

In years past, firewood was stacked six feet high and at right angles, making a solid fence to block these mechanical objects from view, and now, with the death of an ancient black locust that was cut down on the road, I imagine a great new garden opportunity.

This fallen mammoth was brought to the site in chunks and will become the bones of the newly-named “wood garden.” Slices of the locust tree; three, massive, scallop-edged ovals, lean against a cherry tree, looking as though the tree trunk had been carved by a chainsaw right on this very spot. Other sections of the trunk are stacked at intersections and along the

firewood enclosure, designed to look as though this wood, too, will become firewood.

Using the wooden tableau and the paths to guide us, Heather and I plant a backdrop; two dozen pots of a chartreuse-leaved, *iris cristata*, “powder blue crested giant,” a dwarf early bloomer that is happy in dry shade. Around these lime-y fans, we will scratch in hundreds of an inexpensive but generous spreader, *Scilla Siberica alba*, that puts out 6-inch tall wands of star-shaped flowers in April.

We will add in handfuls of *fritellaria meleagris alba*, an old-fashioned bulb that produces 8-inch tall wiry stems of elegant, bell-shaped blooms.

Last, we will transplant clumps of the airy perennial Solomon’s Seal for height and grace, and pips of white lilies-of-the-valley to use as ground cover.

As old beds are revamped and new beds are made, cats come to help. Harry, a smartly dressed tuxedo cat, supervises the work from his seat on a chunk of locust tree. Tommy and Charles, a marmalade tabby and a spiffy gray-and-white one, play patty-cake with earthworms, while big Babe rolls seductively in the freshly-turned mulch.

I love the smell of the earth, the imagining of what will be and the pleasure of making good use of this leftover plot that has, until now, been untouched during my twenty-four years in this place.

In early September, I already see a deliciously rampant and floriferous spring.



I buy my bulbs from Van Engelen, Inc. in Bantam, Conn.  
www.vanengelen.com Ph: (860) 567-8734



Maxine Paetro. Photo by J. May

Maxine Paetro co-writes with author, James Patterson. Their two recent collaborations, “8th Confession” and “Swimsuit” are both NY Times #1 best-sellers. See more of her Amenia garden, Broccoli Hall, at BroccoliHall.com.

Photographer Jennifer May’s work has appeared in the New York Times, Gourmet, People, and many other publications. She is currently working on two book projects to be published in 2010: “River of Words: Portraits of Hudson Valley Writers”; and a book of portraits of women for Stewart, Tabori & Chang. See more of her work at jennifermay.com.

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